

## **Sainthood and Politics in the Baroque Age: The cult of St Vincent Ferrer in Brittany, France.**

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In 1636, the Dominican Albert Le Grand presented his book *Les Vies des saints de la Bretagne armorique* to the Estates of Brittany. The Estates had sponsored the project to the sum of 1,000 *livres* and Le Grand duly gave them a presentation copy bound with silk and decorated with the arms of the duchy.<sup>1</sup> The work was a history of the lives of the saints and apostles who had spread Christianity in Brittany in the post-Roman centuries, those who had migrated from the British Isles and those born within the province. An exception to this Celtic hagiography was the *Life* of the Catalan Saint Vincent Ferrer, who was born in Valencia in Spain and died in Vannes in 1419. He was treated as an apostle of Brittany because of his missions there in the two years before his death. A year after Le Grand completed his work the cult of St Vincent Ferrer was revived at Vannes. In 1637, his relics were translated into a new chapel in the cathedral, pilgrimage was encouraged to his shrine and his cult was disseminated throughout the diocese by Bishop Sébastien de Rosmadec. The resurgence of interest in Ferrer and other saints came at a time of increased Tridentine-inspired activity in Brittany, with the introduction of new devotions, internal missionary activity and renewed attention paid to sacred sites and objects. It was a regional example of the renewal of collective and personal piety seen in Baroque

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<sup>1</sup> Albert Le Grand, ed. D.L. Miorcec de Kerdanet, *Les Vies des saints de la Bretagne Armorique* (1636). (Brest: P. Abber and Paris: Isidore Pesron, 1837), 240. I would like to thank Professor James Daybell for his comments on this article.

Catholicism across Europe.

*Les Vies des saints* was not merely hagiography for devout readers, however. The work also had a political function. In a recent study of the relationship between the Breton Estates and the French Crown, Jason Nice has shown that the 1630s were a period of dispute and friction over regional legal privileges, initially over the Church and latterly, over taxation. In particular, the first years of the decade saw tension over royal appointments to the Breton episcopate and the use of the *régale* in Brittany. Nice argues that the distinctive history of the origins and organisation of the Breton Church was called upon to bolster the legal foundations of the Estates' dispute with the Crown, and that works of history and hagiography were sponsored to this end.<sup>2</sup> The saints who had evangelised the province and created its distinctive religious culture were thus called upon to support it against encroaching royal authority.

The politics of sainthood in early modern Europe meant that spiritual renewal and secular government were often intimately linked. Sainthood and hagiography revived by the Counter Reformation became enmeshed in the governmental actions of many states in the early seventeenth century as the saints were called upon to support dynastic and political ends. In 1638, Louis XIII dedicated the kingdom of France to the Virgin Mary and John IV of Portugal followed his example in 1646, dedicating his realm to the Virgin of the Immaculate Conception. In Wittelsbach Bavaria, the identity of the emerging dynastic state was reflected in its possession of a unique pantheon of saintly intercessors. As part of his propaganda war against Protestantism, Duke Maximilian commissioned the Jesuit Mattheaus Rader to write Bavarian *Sancta et pia*, the lives of holy men and women historically associated with the duchy.<sup>3</sup> The harnessing of the saints for political causes occurred also in Brittany, in the context of a quarrel between the province and the

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2 Jason Nice, *Sacred History and National Identity. Comparisons between early modern Wales and Brittany*. (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2009).

3 Trevor Johnson, *Magistrates, Madonnas and Miracles: the Counter Reformation in the Upper Palatinate*. (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 242-46; Howard Louthan, *Tongues, Toes and Bones: Remembering Saints in Early Modern Bohemia*. In Alexandra Walsham, ed., *Relics and Remains*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 169.

French Crown. For support in their dispute with the king, the Breton elites turned to sacred histories and called upon holy helpers such as Vincent Ferrer to assist in the politics of regional rights and privileges.

In this article, the spiritual and secular causes of the renewal of the cult of St Vincent Ferrer are explored. It is argued that Brittany's self-identity as a culturally, legally and politically distinct province within the French kingdom was closely related to the holy actions and favoured places of its special local saints. But as definitions of sainthood and proofs of sanctity became more rigorous and closely controlled by the Papacy and episcopate in the Counter Reformation, Bretons increasingly turned to international saints rather than Celtic cults, for their protection. As the saints of the wider Church were progressively favoured, so Bretons incorporated new legends and traditions into their own history; the achievements of saints on Breton soil, rather than the Breton origins of saints, became important. Also, the enhanced importance of saints in the early seventeenth century gave them augmented political capital as well. In Brittany, they were called upon to show the duchy's distinctiveness from France and to justify its particular political institutions and legal traditions. However, paradoxically, the international nature of the new devotions favoured closer integration with wider religious and political developments in the French kingdom, for the universalism of these saints linked them to a wider constituency of interests than those of the province alone.

### **A Holy Prolegomena: The Life and Afterlife of St Vincent Ferrer in Fifteenth and Sixteenth-Century Vannes.**

To understand the causes and significance of the revival of the cult of St Vincent Ferrer in the 1630s, it is useful to trace the origins and development of the shrine over the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. In the later Middle Ages, sainthood and politics were already closely tied. The influence of secular power was vital to the creation and patronage of saints' cults, while royal and aristocratic families used their relationships with holy men and women as a sign and agency of their authority. This was the case in Brittany, where the cult of St Vincent Ferrer was linked initially at least with the patronage of the ducal house.

It was the great fortune of Vannes Cathedral to become the final resting place of St Vincent Ferrer, one of the most famous preachers of the early fifteenth century. Ferrer was born in 1357 in Valencia, Spain, and entered the Dominican order in 1374. In the early 1390s, he joined the entourage of Cardinal Pedro de Luna and when de Luna was elected pope as Benedict XIII at Avignon in 1394, the Dominican accompanied the pontiff as his confessor. During an illness at Avignon in 1398, Ferrer had a vision of Christ and Saints Dominic and Francis, who ordered him to leave Benedict's court in order to preach the gospel. During the next twenty years, Ferrer travelled widely, to Spain, northern Italy, the Vaudois where he preached against heresy, the Low Countries, the British Isles, France and Italy.<sup>4</sup> Duke Jean V of Brittany invited Ferrer to the duchy on several occasions and in 1417 the Dominican arrived at Nantes. Ferrer spent most of the next two years on preaching tours in Brittany. Despite linguistic challenges – Ferrer preached in Catalan rather than French or Breton – he drew large crowds because of his ‘flamboyant religion’, theatrical in style, alternating reassurances of peace and salvation with hellfire warnings against sin and judgement.<sup>5</sup> The Dominican died in Vannes in 1419, aged 63. His companions tried to get him to return to Spain, but he was too ill and in any case, Ferrer told his assistants, Christ had warned him at Avignon that he would die at the ends of the earth, in the west.<sup>6</sup>

Immediately after his death, Ferrer was treated as a saint. The ducal family was quick to promote his sanctity. The duchess of Brittany helped to wash his corpse and kept the water used for this purpose for long afterwards. The duke organized a magnificent funeral in Vannes Cathedral, where Ferrer was buried next to the high altar.<sup>7</sup> A *Life* was commissioned and miracles began to be recorded. The duchess

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4 Guy-Alexis de Lobineau, ed., Abbé Tresvaux, *Les vies des saints de Bretagne* (1725). 5 vols. (Paris: Méquignan, 1837) III, 162-184. Lobineau's ‘Life’ was based on a ‘Life’ by Pierre Ranzano of the mid-1450s.

5 Hervé Martin, *Les Bretons et leurs prédicateurs à la fin du Moyen Age*. In ‘*Mémoires de la Société d'Histoire et d'Archéologie de Bretagne*’ 67 (1990), 31-32, 34, 40-1.

6 For a detailed account of Ferrer's Breton missions see Lobineau, *Les vies des saints*, vol. 3, 195-99.

7 Ibid., 202 ; J.-M. Le Méné, *Histoire du diocèse de Vannes*, 2 vols. (Vannes: n.p., 1889), vol. 1, p. 409.

Jeanne, who died in 1433, was interred next to Ferrer the duke founded an altar dedicated to the Dominican and daily masses for her soul were established.<sup>8</sup> Directly after Ferrer's funeral, a campaign for his canonisation began supported by Duke Jean V and the Dominican order. Pope Martin V showed little interest in the matter however, and the process stalled. In the 1450s, the Dominicans again took up his cause and an enquiry held during the winter of 1453-54 heard 311 Breton witnesses make depositions about Ferrer's miraculous intercessions.<sup>9</sup> With the help of Duke Pierre II, the successor of Jean V, Ferrer was canonized in 1455 and his feast set on the day of his death, 6<sup>th</sup> April.<sup>10</sup> The tomb was opened and the relics of the saint were translated in the presence of the Breton bishops and leading clerics from neighbouring provinces.<sup>11</sup> In 1458, Calixtus III granted an indulgence of 40 days to those who visited the cathedral on the saint's feast day and over the next half century the shrine at Vannes became the most important late medieval cult centre in Brittany.<sup>12</sup>

St Vincent Ferrer was adopted as a patron of the ducal family, several of whom had personal devotions to the saint and gave gifts to the shrine. St Vincent Ferrer was represented in the books of hours of Duke Pierre II and of Duchess Isabelle Stuart. In the will of Pierre II a reliquary containing one of the saint's fingers – probably an object of personal devotion – was left to the collegiate church of Notre Dame of Nantes, where the duke was buried.<sup>13</sup> In 1494, Duchess Isabelle was buried in Vannes cathedral, established a daily mass at the altar of St Vincent Ferrer and gave 2,000 golden *écus* for the foundation.<sup>14</sup> The saint's shrine at Vannes was closely associated with the burial place and chantry foundations of several duchesses and became an important site of commemoration and remembrance for the ducal family. The memory

8 J.-M. Le Méné, *L'Eglise cathédrale de Vannes*. In *Congrès archéologique de France, XLVIIIe session 1881*, (Paris: Champion, 1882), 186.

9 Archives Départementales du Morbihan (ADM) 87 G 11 Procès de canonisation de Saint Vincent Ferrer.

10 Lobineau, *Les vies des saints*, vol. 3, p. 205.

11 Le Méné, *L'Eglise cathédrale de Vannes*, 187.

12 Le Méné, *Histoire du diocèse de Vannes*, vol. 1, p. 410.

13 Martin, *Les Bretons et leurs prédicateurs*, 48.

14 A. de Barthélemy, *Saint Vincent Ferrier dans le diocèse de Saint-Brieuc*. In '*Revue de Bretagne et de Vendée*', 18 (1874), 124.

of this association would again become important in the seventeenth century.

The shrine of St Vincent Ferrer became the most profitable pilgrimage centre in Brittany and attracted local and international visitors. The Dominicans promoted the cult by linking the saint's invocation to cures for plague.<sup>15</sup> Pilgrims' offerings contributed greatly to the rebuilding of Vannes cathedral in the fifteenth century. The saint's relics were exhibited on each major feast day; they attracted donations and oaths were sworn on them. The parishes surrounding Vannes undertook pilgrimages to the tomb. In October 1482, the parishioners of Séné made an offering there; those of Theix came in 1492 and 1501, Sarzeau in 1493, and in 1501 the parishioners of St Nolff took a vow on the head of the saint. Parishioners from Treffléan, Pléran and Arradon visited the shrine in 1517 while five separate groups of Spanish pilgrims also came in that year.<sup>16</sup> Wealthy individuals also gave gifts. Small sums of money were left to the saint by canons of the cathedral in their wills; for example, Dom Locronon left 10 *sous* in 1485 and Dom Allain Gourion left 30 *sous* in 1501.<sup>17</sup> Monsieur le Maréchal visited the tomb with his retinue, giving 15 *sous* in 1490 and 27 *sous* in 1496.<sup>18</sup> The nearest competitor to the shrine of St Vincent at Vannes was that of St Yves in Tréguier cathedral in northern Brittany. Here, the shrine accrued between 50 and 60 *livres* per annum during the final third of the fifteenth century, a quarter of that given at Vannes.<sup>19</sup>

In the sixteenth century, the vitality of the cult becomes difficult to evaluate as the cathedral fabric accounts are fragmentary and inconsistently kept. However, records of donations to his relics on his feast day and at other times of the year show that popularity of the

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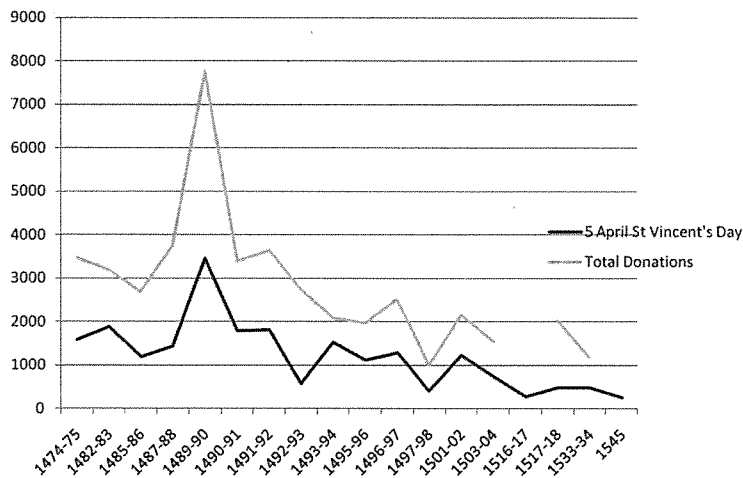
15 Jean-Pierre Leguay and Hervé Martin, *Fastes et malheurs de la Bretagne ducale 1213-1532*. (Rennes: Ouest France, 1982), 366 ; Martin, *Les Bretons et leurs prédicateurs*, 49; Hervé Martin, *La mission de Saint Vincent Ferrier en Bretagne (1418-19): un exercice mesuré de la violence prophétique*. In 'Bulletin de l'Association Bretonne', 106 (1997) 139.

16 ADM 74 G 2 – 74 G 19. Comptes de la fabrique de la Cathédrale St Pierre, Vannes.

17 ADM 74 G 4, 74 G 17.

18 ADM 74 G 10, 74 G 15.

19 Georges Minois, *Culte des saints et vie religieuse dans le diocèse de Tréguier au XVe siècle*. In 'Annales de Bretagne', 87 (1980), 20.



**Figure 1:** Income from the relics and tomb of St Vincent Ferrer, in sous, 1474-1545.

shrine declined after 1500. Veneration continued in some places. There was a confraternity dedicated to the saint in Rennes, for which Bishop Yves Mahyeuc approved indulgences in 1508.<sup>20</sup> In 1525, Francis I, captive in Spain, promised the Dominicans of Valencia an arm of St Vincent Ferrer, although the cathedral chapter of Vannes evaded the gift.<sup>21</sup> Further, the chapter accounts of 1545 refer to ‘the pressure of the crowds because of the feast of St Vincent Ferrer’ on 5 April, even if only 14 *livres* were collected on this day, a small sum compared to previous years.<sup>22</sup> But overall, fewer pilgrims were attracted to the shrine.

The religious conflicts of the later sixteenth century saw the beginnings of renewed interest in the saint. During the wars of the Catholic League in the 1590s, the relics of Ferrer were almost lost,

20 Bruno Isbled, *Yves Mahyeuc à la lumière des archives rennaises*. In Augustin Pic and Georges Provost, eds., *Yves Mahyeuc 1546-1541. Rennes en Renaissance*. (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2010) 184.

21 J.-P. Leguay, *Histoire de Vannes et sa région* (Toulouse: Privat, 1988), 154.

22 ADM 74 G 21. Comptes de la fabrique de la Cathédrale St Pierre de Vannes.

used as a bargaining counter in relations between Brittany and Spain. In this decade, the rebellious governor of Brittany, the duke of Mercoeur, received military aid from Spain in his struggle against the French king. As part of his negotiations with Philip II, Mercoeur promised to send the body of St Vincent Ferrer to Madrid as a contribution to the king's growing relic collection.<sup>23</sup> In January 1592, the duke wrote to the cathedral chapter at Vannes, telling the canons of the Spanish king's singular devotion to the saint, asking them to grant him the favour of sending the body to Spain.<sup>24</sup> The chapter demurred and offered a relic instead.<sup>25</sup> In July, Philip II himself wrote to the chapter, asking for the saint to be sent to him forthwith, but again the chapter refused. In a reply of May 1593 they argued that nothing could be done without the bishop's permission, and that he was absent in Paris. Also, they had a papal bull expressly forbidding the removal of the saint from the cathedral, under pain of excommunication.<sup>26</sup> In 1596, a Spanish garrison in Vannes decided to take matters into its own hands and steal the relics. But the plot was foiled by the dean of the cathedral, who hid the saint in his house. When the dean died, the relics were moved to the cathedral sacristy, where according to tradition they were placed in a cupboard, neglected and forgotten for a generation.<sup>27</sup> But in the 1630s they were restored to their former prominence, a result of spiritual revival and a means of political propaganda. St Vincent Ferrer took his place again as a protector of Brittany.

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23 It may be coincidence, but a new *Life* of the saint was published in Catalan in Valencia in 1589. See Tomàs Martínez Romero, *Sobre les causes i les estratègies editorials d'una traducció: La vida de sant Vincent Ferrer (1598)*. In 'Bulletin of Spanish Studies', 88 (2011), 655-65; Le Méné, *Histoire du diocèse de Vannes*, vol. 2, p. 35.

24 J.M. Mouillard, *Vie de Saint Vincent Ferrier, ses prédications, ses miracles, sa canonisation, son culte, son tombeau et ses reliques à Vannes* (Vannes : n.p., 1856), 351, letter of 6 January 1592..

25 Ibid., 351, letter of 24 January 1592.

26 Ibid., 353-55. Howard Louthan shows that Philip II also used his authority on behalf of Toledo to compel religious houses in France and the Low Countries to relinquish the bones of St Eugenio, the city's first bishop, and St Leocadia, an early virgin martyr. Louthan, *Tongues*, 168.

27 Lobineau, *Les vies des saints*, vol. 3, pp. 208-209.



### St Vincent Ferrer Revived: Baroque Sanctity and the Counter Reformation in Brittany.

The reasons for the 'rediscovery' of St Vincent Ferrer in the 1630s are primarily the resurgent interest in saints and sanctity that was a prominent feature of Baroque Catholicism throughout Europe.<sup>28</sup> The renewal of the cult was spiritual rather than political in its initial inspiration, but the power of sanctity endowed the saint with significance in regional and kingdom-wide politics. Post-Tridentine saints had authority in the spiritual and the temporal spheres.

There had been a widespread decline in saints' cults during the Reformation. Even before Luther, evangelicals such as Erasmus called for greater restraint in, and even abolition of, the outward forms of the veneration of saints, pilgrimages and relics. Protestant attacks on saints and their rejection of intercession also seems to have reduced Catholic confidence in holy people and places. There were few canonisations in the sixteenth century; between 1523 and 1588, there were none at all.<sup>29</sup> But the Council of Trent reaffirmed the legitimacy and importance of the cult of saints and the veneration of their images and relics and from the later sixteenth century, shrines and pilgrimages again grew in popularity.<sup>30</sup> Yet there were changes over the period. An important part of the Counter-Reformation resurgence of the cult of the saints was new tests and proofs of sainthood. Joseph Bergin argues that the attempt 'to reorient the cult of the saints meant that some were more suited than others for the purpose ... the most appropriate and valuable saints were those who were witnesses to, or models of that faith, who would be content with the role of intercessors with God on behalf of backsliding, sinning Christians'.<sup>31</sup> The 'rediscovery' of St Vincent

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28 Mathieu Lours, *Cathédrales, reliques et pèlerinages: l'épreuve de la modernité*. In Catherine Vincent and Jacques Pycke, eds., *Cathédrale et pèlerinage aux époques médiévale et moderne*. (Louvain: University of Louvain Press, 2010), 128.

29 Peter Burke, *How to be a Counter-Reformation Saint*. In Kaspar von Greyerz ed., *Religion and Society in Early Modern Europe, 1500-1800*. (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1984), 46.

30 Louthan, *Tongues*, 167.

31 Joseph Bergin, *Church, Society and Religious Change in France 1580-1730*. (New Haven, Conn. and London: Yale University Press, 2009), 232-33, 236-37.

Ferrer in 1636-37 was an official and public act to revitalize the cult of the saint and to ensure its wide recognition, operating within the new formal definitions of post-Tridentine sanctity. Ecclesiastical politics of the relations between provincial dioceses and Rome influenced the selection of St Vincent Ferrer above other saints housed in Vannes Cathedral's collection of relics.

Attention to St Vincent Ferrer was initially revived by Bishop Jacques Martin, prelate of Vannes (1599-1622). In 1614, Bishop Martin commissioned a large tapestry of fourteen panels showing the life and miracles of the saint, to be hung in the cathedral on his feast day.<sup>32</sup> Further, a number of high-status visitors came to Vannes to visit the tomb. In 1614, Charles de Cossé duke of Brissac, lieutenant-general of Brittany, visited the shrine. He requested some relics for his parish church of Brissac, which was dedicated to the saint.<sup>33</sup> A second relic was given to the duke's son in 1635.<sup>34</sup> The traditional midnight procession to mark St Vincent's feast day on 5 April, abandoned during the later wars of religion, was refounded in 1617 by Jean Morin, seneschal of Vannes, and his wife Jeanne Huteau. The procession took the jawbone relic of St Vincent – which had remained all this time on public display in its reliquary – around the cathedral, with stages at the saint's tomb, the choir and the parish altar of Sainte-Croix.<sup>35</sup> Monsieur de la Galissonnière, *conseiller d'état*, visited the tomb and gave silver lamps to the shrine.<sup>36</sup> In 1631 Jean le Gentil, counsellor and almoner of the Queen Mother, vicar general of Vannes, founded a weekly sung obit on Wednesdays at the saint's altar.<sup>37</sup> It was in this context of renewed interest in St Vincent Ferrer that the bishop and chapter of Vannes decided to refurbish the shrine.

Work began in 1631, when a picture of St Vincent hung in the

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32 Pierre Thomas-Lacroix, *Saint Vincent Ferrer*. (Vannes : Galles, 1954), 51-2 ; J.-M. Le Méné, *Tapiserie de Saint Vincent Ferrer*. In *Congrès archéologique de France, XLVIII session 1881* (Paris : Champion, 1882), 238-47.

33 Brissac-Quincé, today in Maine-et-Loire. Mouillard, *Vie*, 396.

34 Le Méné, *Histoire du diocèse de Vannes*, vol. 2, pp. 49, 71.

35 ADM 59 G 10 Chapelains et services des anniversaires de St Pierre Vannes ; Le Méné, *Histoire du diocèse de Vannes*, vol. 2, p. 50.

36 Mouillard, *Vie*, 362.

37 ADM 55 G 3. Chapitre de Saint-Pierre, Vannes. Fondations.

cathedral was repainted.<sup>38</sup> In 1632, the chapter commissioned a silver reliquary from a Parisian goldsmith and in 1634, a contract for a new chapel was drawn up, to be constructed behind the choir and dedicated jointly to the Blessed Virgin and to St Vincent Ferrer. The building was finished and consecrated in 1637. Its altar was constructed with a niche for the new reliquary and with statues of the patron saints of the cathedral, Vincent Ferrer, Patern and Guenaël. On 3 August 1637, the bones in the unmarked wooden casket stored in the sacristy were translated into the church in a formal assembly of theologians, heads of religious orders, officers of Vannes cathedral and leading members of the lay community. On 5 September, the remains in the box were placed in the new silver reliquary and on 6 September carried in procession around Vannes with 'stations' at the convents of the Capuchins, Dominicans and Carmelites.<sup>39</sup> The above scheme of activities shows that the relics of the saint were never lost. The 'rediscovery' of 1636-37 was, rather, an official and public act to revitalise the cult of the saint and to ensure its wide recognition.

In Brittany as elsewhere in Europe, one response to the renewed impulse to the saints during the Baroque era was the resurrection of local cults. Indeed, there is an historiographical tradition which argues for the persistence of a distinctive Celtic religious identity in the early modern period, shown particularly in devotions to local saints and shrines. Alain Croix has argued that Breton saints related to the early conversion of the province continued to be favoured throughout the period, in preference to the general saints of the international church.<sup>40</sup> It is certain that Le Grand's *Les Vies des saints* rapidly became popular and contributed greatly to a rejuvenation of interest in Brittany's early saints. At the same time, internal missionaries preaching in the west of Brittany actively revived the cults of the region's early evangelists. The missionary Michel Le Nobletz, active from 1608 until his death

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38 Claire Bourhis, *Le culte de Saint Vincent Ferrer à Vannes aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles*. Mémoire de Master 2, (Université de Rennes II, Haute-Bretagne, 2006), 111.

39 ADM 79 G 4 Recettes et dépenses de la Chapitre de Vannes 1583-1667; Lobineau, *Les vies des saints*, vol. 3, pp. 210-211.

40 Nice, *Sacred History*; Alain Croix, *La Bretagne aux XVIe et XVIIe siècles: la vie, la mort, la foi*. 2 vols (Paris: Maloine, 1981).

in 1652, had as his model and hero St Paul Aurélian, founder of the diocese of Léon, who had evangelised in north western Brittany in the sixth century.<sup>41</sup> The cult of St Corentin was revived by Jesuits working in Quimper, who were eager to establish their credentials in the city through an association with its first bishop. Although relics of the saint were housed in the cathedral and he remained the patron of the city, his cult had declined in popularity.<sup>42</sup> In 1638, during an outbreak of plague Père Bernard organized a public procession with the saint's relics and used the occasion to restore St Corentin's fountain, placing a new statue under its vaulted roof.<sup>43</sup> Julien Maunoir's ministry was likewise put under the protection of St Corentin. After missions to the western isles of Brittany, Maunoir and Bernard went on pilgrimage to the abbey of Landévennec, to say mass on the tomb of St Gwénolé, companion to the saint.<sup>44</sup>

Maunoir also encouraged the revival of early saints' cults in the countryside. An example of this occurred at Mûr, where the rector built a new chapel to house the tomb of the holy anchorite Elouan, to whom he believed he owed recovery from illness. Maunoir was invited to preach at the laying of the first stone of the new chapel, where he spoke of the ancient devotion to St Elouan and the long neglect of the veneration of his tomb.<sup>45</sup> The religious revival fostered by the missionaries was anchored firmly in the traditions of the past.

The bishop and canons of Vannes cathedral could have chosen to resurrect the cult of a Celtic saint in the 1630s, for they possessed the relics of the founders of the diocese, Saints Gwenaël and Patern. But they preferred to patronise St Vincent Ferrer instead. Religious politics played an important role here. The Counter-Reformation resurgence of the cult of the saints included new tests and proofs of sainthood. In 1563 in the XXV session, the Council of Trent reformed the procedure of authenticating relics, specifying that no new remains were to be

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41 J. Maunoir, ed., H. Pérennès, *La Vie du Vénérable Dom Michel Le Nobletz*. (Saint-Brieuc: Prudhomme, 1934), 165-67.

42 Lobineau, *Les vies des saints*, vol. 4, pp. 176-77.

43 A. Boschet, *Le Parfait Missionnaire ou la vie du Reverend Père Julien Maunoir*. (Paris: Jean Anisson, 1697), 66-68; Lobineau, *Les vies des saints*, vol. 4, p. 268.

44 Boschet, *Le Parfait Missionnaire*, 137.

45 Ibid., *Le Parfait Missionnaire*, 201; Lobineau, *Les vies des saints*, vol. 5, p. 81.

accepted as holy without their formal recognition and approbation by local bishops.<sup>46</sup> Further, while Rome effectively possessed a monopoly on canonisation from 1234, the post-Tridentine papacy attempted to define and control sainthood even more closely than it had in the past.<sup>47</sup> In 1588, the Sacred Congregation of Rites and Ceremonies was founded, which was to be responsible for examining candidates for sainthood and for the regulation of cults. The next decades were to see a progressive tightening of the procedures for canonisation, which resulted in a shift from a theological to a juridical definition of sanctity.<sup>48</sup> Saint-making procedures were further formalized in 1625 while in 1634, a decree of Urban VIII forbade the attribution of 'saint' to anyone who had not been recognised as such by the Church and reserved the right to canonize saints exclusively to the papacy. A fifty-year rule was introduced, by which canonisation proceedings could not take place for half a century after the death of an individual.<sup>49</sup> The rules requiring miracles and evidence of holiness of life became stricter than they had been hitherto and the numbers of new saints declined.<sup>50</sup> The sanctity of Vincent Ferrer could be proved officially, by Roman standards, whereas that of Saints Gwenaël and Patern could not for the early saints had not received formal papal canonisation. It was for this reason that the Catalan was preferred to a Celtic saint.

Also, by the 1630s, the role of saints in salvation was more closely defined. For Catholic reformers, saints were exemplars of Christian virtues, intercessors with God and guides for individuals. The more popular and widespread view of saints as miracle workers to whom veneration was directly made was not denied but was to be more closely supervised by clergy while 'superstitions' surrounding cults were discouraged. A saint was to be seen as a model of virtue and behaviour, not as a wonder-worker or protector in his or her own right.

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46 Trevor Johnson, *Holy Fabrications: The Catacomb Saints and the Counter-Reformation in Bavaria*. In 'Journal of Ecclesiastical History', 47 (1996), 275-76.

47 André Vauchez, transl. Jean Birrell, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 32.

48 Simon Ditchfield, *Sanctity in Early Modern Italy*. In 'Journal of Ecclesiastical History' 47 (1996), 103.

49 Burke, *How to be a Counter-Reformation Saint*, 47.

50 Bergin, *Church, Society and Religious Change*, 235.

St Vincent Ferrer met these conditions well and to a much greater extent than the old, Breton saints. He was recognised by the Roman Church for traits vital to Counter-Reformation sanctity, his holy lifestyle and his preaching, his work among infidels and heretics, as well as the miracles wrought before and after his death. Ferrer's fifteenth-century biographer Pierre Ranzano recorded the details of this exemplary life, so this was a well-documented saint.<sup>51</sup> Simon Ditchfield comments that Vincent Ferrer, like Bernadino da Siena, canonized in the same decade, was the sort of saint particularly promoted by the fifteenth-century papacy, educated, doctrinally orthodox and clerical.<sup>52</sup> It was a model still recognised and approved by the post-Tridentine papacy.

For these reasons, it was advantageous for Vannes cathedral to revive the cult of a saint of the international church, authorized and authenticated by a papal commission and bull of canonisation, rather than a local man whose sanctity was based on tradition, no matter how venerable. St Vincent Ferrer was 'a saint with a usable past'.<sup>53</sup> He had worked to combat Islam and Judaism in Spain and heresy in the Waldensian Alps, relevant to the recent wars with Protestantism in France. His desire to heal the schism in the papacy and his canonisation in a church that had been recently reunified following a shorter schism of Bale (1437-49) made him a 'pillar of Christianity and a guarantor of its unity'.<sup>54</sup> He was an evangelist to many regions including Brittany and he had lived a particularly pious life. He fitted the Catholic Reform agenda for sainthood well. On the other hand, for the local laity, sanctity remained first and foremost the ability to work wonders and particularly to heal. St Vincent Ferrer also met these requirements. The two contrasting roles of hero and healer, two visions of sainthood, one privileged by the ecclesiastical hierarchy, the other embraced by the ordinary Catholic, came together in this saint.<sup>55</sup> He was local and

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51 Lobineau, *Les vies des saints*, vol. 3, pp. 186-91; René Blanchard, 'Saint Vincent Ferrier: Durée de son apostolat en Bretagne. In *'Revue de Bretagne et de Vendée'* 31 (1887), 380-88.

52 Ditchfield, *Sanctity in Early Modern Italy*, 102.

53 Louthan, *Tongues*, 172.

54 Martin, *La mission de Saint Vincent Ferrier*, 140.

55 R.P. Hsia, *The World of Catholic Renewal 1540-1770*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 134.

universal, Vannetais and a saint of the wider Catholic world. He could be promoted by the bishop and chapter as 'a local intercessor, close to the prayers of the faithful and as a direct result of reforms overseen by the Holy Office and Congregation of Rites, particularising the universal message of salvation and redemption through the Holy Roman and Catholic Church'.<sup>56</sup> He became, by the location of his activities before and after death, a Breton and a world-wide saint. St Vincent Ferrer's cause was therefore acceptable to a wide constituency. He was a model of Baroque sainthood and he could work in a variety of situations. One of the causes to which his sanctity was applied was that of regional political affairs.

### **The Politics of Sanctity: the Catalan Saint, Celtic Identity and Regional Privilege.**

The revival of St Vincent Ferrer's cult at Vannes occurred in the context of the heightened politicisation of the clerical and lay elites of Brittany, created by deteriorating relations with the French Crown. Along with other Breton saints, Ferrer was called upon symbolically to bear witness to the historic and political distinctiveness of the province, for its religious culture was the clearest manifestation of its unique status. Under the administration of Cardinal de Richelieu, Louis XIII's principal minister and also royal governor of Brittany, tensions arose between the Crown and the duchy. The first years of the Cardinal's ministry, in the late 1620s and early 1630s, saw fundamental changes in French government and Brittany's relationship with the crown altered in this decade.<sup>57</sup> There were two key issues. One area of tension occurred over royal appointments to the Breton episcopate and the use of the *régale* in Brittany, the right of the crown to take the revenues of vacant sees and to appoint bishops directly. According to the terms of the edict of Plessis-Mace, which agreed the union of Brittany with France in 1532, the Breton church was to remain separate from that of the French kingdom. Brittany was traditionally a *pays d'obedience*, a territory

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56 Ditchfield, *Sanctity in Early Modern Italy*, 111-12.

57 James B. Collins, *Classes, Estates and Order in Early Modern Brittany*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 187.

where the papacy nominated to vacant benefices during certain months of the year. Further, it was not subject to the Concordat of 1516 agreed between Francis I and Leo X, because it was not at that point part of the French kingdom.<sup>58</sup> In theory, therefore, the king did not have the rights over episcopal appointments that he enjoyed in the wider realm. Also the edict of union stated that only Bretons would be nominated for sees in the province, with exception made for members of the household of the king. This could be interpreted widely of course and the sixteenth century saw national figures appointed to Breton sees.<sup>59</sup> In the early seventeenth century, Marie de Medicis' dower rights included presentations to seven of the Breton sees and gave her extensive rights of patronage in the province. However, she appointed mostly local men such as Sébastien de Rosmadec to Vannes, Guillaume Le Prestre to Quimper, Pierre Cornulier to Rennes and René de Rieux to Léon, with only two non-Bretons, Philippe Cospéau to Nantes and André Le Porc de la Porte to Saint-Brieuc. In 1631, Cardinal Richelieu became governor of Brittany and inherited the Queen Mother's influence over the bishoprics. The pattern of appointments changed quickly. Almost immediately, Richelieu dismissed bishops throughout France who supported Marie de Medicis, including René de Rieux of St-Pol-de-Léon, and appointed his own men instead.<sup>60</sup> In the period 1629-41, all but one of the Breton dioceses was vacated and the key bishoprics of Saint-Malo, Nantes, Rennes and Saint-Brieuc, all went to clients of the cardinal. The proportion of native-born bishops among his appointees was small, at 29.7 per cent. Even in western Brittany, where it was desirable for bishops to speak Breton, only Quimper had an unbroken succession of local bishops.<sup>61</sup> This was an 'affront to Breton liberties' as defined in 1532.<sup>62</sup>

A second, slightly later, dispute was over taxation. Direct taxation

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58 Barthélemy Pocquet, *Histoire de Bretagne*, vol. 5. *La Bretagne province 1515-1715*. (Rennes: Plihon and Hommau, 1913), 577.

59 Alain Croix, *L'âge d'or de la Bretagne 1532-1675*. (Rennes: Ouest-France, 1993), 38.

60 Nice, *Sacred History*, 112.

61 Joseph Bergin, *The Making of the French Episcopate 1589-1661*. (New Haven, Conn. and London: Yale University Press, 1996), 52-3, 177, 468-9.

62 Nice, *Sacred History*, 102, 104.



was stable in the early 1630s, at around 500,000 to 550,000 *livres* a year. However, from 1638, the king raised considerable extraordinary sums. In the 1640s, the creation of a new imposition, the *fouage extraordinaire*, increased indirect taxes by around 80 per cent.<sup>63</sup> Related to this was the presence of troops in the province from 1637. In this year, Vannes spent 14,000 *livres* on the regiment of the duke de la Meilleraye: 2,882 *livres* on delegations to various authorities trying to get the troops to move on and 10,640 *livres* on the troops themselves.<sup>64</sup> All of these caused considerable tension between the provincial estates and the Crown.

To support the claims of the duchy to have Breton bishops and regionally-assessed and organized taxation, the Estates looked to the past and sponsored historical and literary works detailing the origins of Breton liberties and practices.<sup>65</sup> In particular, sacred histories promoted the special status and historical traditions of the Church of the province against the claims of the Crown.<sup>66</sup> There was a tradition of such histories being used to dispute the legality of royal actions in Brittany. During conflicts between the Estates and Henry III over fiscal and legal privileges, in 1582/3, Bertrand d'Argentré published *L'Histoire de Bretagne*. This caused much royal displeasure because of its particularist interpretation of Franco-Breton relations in the fifteenth century and d'Argentré was compelled to re-edit the work for a new edition in 1588.<sup>67</sup> In the seventeenth century, the saints were invoked to act as witnesses to Brittany's autonomous past. In *Les vies des saints de la Bretagne armorique*, Le Grand argued that seven of the Breton dioceses had been founded by British immigrants in the fifth century, a cultural distinctiveness which by rights should persist.<sup>68</sup> In 1638, an *Histoire de Bretagne* was published, written in the late fifteenth century by Pierre Le Baud, chaplain to Queen Anne. The manuscript had been

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63 Collins, *Classes*, 151.

64 Ibid., 143-44.

65 Nice, *Sacred History*, 12.

66 Ibid., 70-71.

67 See Jean Kerhervé, *Écriture et réécriture de l'histoire dans l'Histoire de Bretagne de Bertrand d'Argentré. L'exemple du Livre XII*. In Noël-Yves Tonnerre, ed., *Chroniqueurs et historiens de la Bretagne du Moyen Age au milieu du XXe siècle*. (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2001), 77-109.

68 Nice, *Sacred History*, 113-14.

found in the library of Monsieur de Rosmadec of Molac, who died in 1613.<sup>69</sup> In 1644, the Dominican Jean de Rechac devoted another, shorter, work to Dominican Breton 'saints', Alain de la Roche, Yves Mahyeuc and Pierre Quintin.<sup>70</sup> The lives of the saints were witness to the distinctive history, traditions and rights of the Breton church.

Further, to bolster Breton claims to ecclesiastical distinctiveness and special sacred status, between 1638 and 1645, the Estates sponsored a campaign to canonize the native Breton bishop of Rennes, Yves Mahyeuc. Another Dominican, Mahyeuc was a native of Plouvorn in the diocese of Léon and was also bishop of Rennes, where he died and was buried in the cathedral in 1541. His tomb rapidly became the focus of an unofficial local cult and attracted pilgrims.<sup>71</sup> A portrait of the bishop at prayer was hung over the sepulchre and his arms were portrayed in the windows of the cathedral, in the episcopal palace and on liturgical vessels in the church.<sup>72</sup> The bishops of Rennes promoted his cult. Bishop Aymar Hennequin requested to be buried in the same tomb of Mahyeuc when he died in 1596. When the tomb was opened Mayheuc's body was found to be incorrupt, so Hennequin was interred in a tomb next to him. In 1638, Bishop Pierre Cornulier, representing the cathedral chapter and the Dominican convent of Rennes, asked the Estates of Brittany to petition the pope for Mahyeuc's canonisation based on 113 miracle accounts which had been collected between 1637 and 1638, from those who had known the saint through their elderly relatives or who had benefited from miracles themselves.<sup>73</sup> The delegates of the Estates justified their pursuit of Mahyeuc's canonisation by emphasising that he was a 'native bishop of the province'. The project was unsuccessful and the cult of Yves Mayheuc remained largely confined to Rennes, but

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69 Le Baud was an uncle of Bertrand d'Argentré. Pocquet, *Histoire de Bretagne*, vol. 5, p. 620.

70 Jean de Giffre de Rechac, *Les vies et actions memorables de trois des plus signalez religieux en sainteté & vertu, de l'ordre des freresprêcheurs de la Province de Bretagne en France. Du B. Yves mahyeuxévêque de Rennes. Du B. Alain de la Roche, docteur en theologie. Du venerablePere Pierre Quintin* (Paris: Claude Le Beau, 1644).

71 Le Grand, *Les Vies des saints*, 540.

72 Dubuisson-Aubenay, *Itinéraire de Bretagne*, vol. 1, p. 15.

73 Lobineau, *Les vies des saints*, vol. 3, 312; Augustin Pic, *La figure d'Yves Mahyeuc dans son procès de canonisation*. In Pic and Provost, eds., *Yves Mahyeuc*, 53-54.

he was a useful counter in the game with the monarchy over episcopal privileges and regional particularity.<sup>74</sup> At the same meeting in 1638, 6,000 *livres* were granted to the church of St-Yves-des-Bretons in Rome, to support its separate status from the French church there. Both the grant and the canonisation request are recorded in the minutes for 6 December, immediately preceded by an entry disputing the crown's abuse of the *régale*.<sup>75</sup> Patronage of such projects was designed to provide theoretical justification and legal precedent for the restoration of the 1532 relationship with the Crown.<sup>76</sup> They emphasized the province's ecclesiastical and legally distinct past.

The revived cult of St Vincent Ferrer was part of this movement. Although not a Breton by birth, he was by death and by virtue of the fact that many of the miracles he wrought had taken place in the province. The origins of the cult were linked to the actions of the fifteenth-century dukes and duchesses; the ducal family founded, funded and continued to support the shrine through their chantries, which were still celebrated in the seventeenth century. The ducal armorial decoration of the tomb site and the daily offices at St Vincent's altar acted as constant reminders of the distinctive, independent Breton past. It was a site of memory, for the history of the province. Further, the refurbishment of the shrine in the 1630s occurred at a time of heightened politicisation of the Church; the site and its symbols linked the canons and their concerns to the independent, ducal past. St Vincent Ferrer was witness and testimony to the separate origins and independence of the Church in Brittany. The Catalan preacher became a Celtic saint as the province needed holy helpers against the Crown.

### **Bishop Rosmadec, Politics and the Counter Reformation in Vannes.**

The link between the spiritual and temporal actions of St Vincent Ferrer was provided by Bishop Sébastien de Rosmadec. As befitted the inauguration of Counter-Reformation devotion, the most active

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74 J.-M. Matz, *La sainteté épiscopale en France (XVe-début XVIe siècles)*. In *ibid.*, 250.

75 Nice, *Sacred History*, 102.

76 *Ibid.*, 12, 106, 112.

proponent of the saint's restoration was the diocesan bishop of Vannes. The Council of Trent had confirmed and strengthened the authority of bishops over their sees in the mid-sixteenth century. Bishops were to supervise more closely the clergy and religious institutions of their dioceses, to correct and encourage the laity and to enhance the spiritual and pastoral lives of their flock. After 1600, France saw the appointment of numerous reforming bishops, who worked to introduce Tridentine ideas into their dioceses. Bishop Rosmadec was one such bishop; as part of his 'mission' he led the renewal of the cult of St Vincent Ferrer, to augment the devotion of his flock and the prestige of his see.

Bishops were also temporal rulers and had long been important local and regional agents of the French Crown. In the early seventeenth century their administrative role increased. They were expected to reside in their sees to facilitate good governance on behalf of the king. As part of this role, bishops in Brittany were important members of the biennial provincial Estates meetings and de Rosmadec attended frequently, acting as president when the Estates met in Vannes. Rosmadec's influence in the spiritual and temporal spheres was one clear means by which religious culture and political identity were brought together.

Bishop de Rosmadec was a native Breton, a younger son of Jean de Rosmadec, seigneur du Plessis-Josso of the parish of Theix, close to Vannes. Rosmadec began his clerical career as a Benedictine at St Germain-des-Prés in Paris and was named bishop of Vannes in 1624. He was a sincere reformer. From the outset of his episcopacy, Rosmadec encouraged the foundation of new religious houses. In 1627, he gave permission for the Ursulines and the Discalced Carmelites to create houses in Vannes. In 1629, he accepted the proposition of the city to entrust the municipal college to the Jesuits. In the 1630s, he allowed the Dominicans to found a house and in 1635 he permitted the Visitandines to move from Le Croisic to Vannes. More famously, the bishop gave permission for the foundation of a shrine to St Anne near Auray, where the shepherd Yves Nicolazic had discovered a miraculous statue in a field. A Carmelite house was built there to organize the pilgrimage centre and in 1632, the bishop granted 40 days' indulgence to pilgrims visiting the shrine.<sup>77</sup> De Rosmadec was a classic Counter-Reformation

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77 Leguay, *Histoire de Vannes*, 157-164; Patrick Huchet, *La grande histoire de Sainte-*

bishop.

Bishop de Rosmadec's prime motive in resurrecting the cult of St Vincent Ferrer was certainly spiritual, to promote the saints and especially this one, for whom he had a personal devotion. The bishop was buried in the saint's new chapel in 1646, where he also founded a daily mass.<sup>78</sup> In his will, he left a large sum for the restoration of the saint's tomb. The sepulchre was relocated into a crypt chapel under the choir, where a large marble monument was erected. It was finished in 1648 and dedicated by his successor and nephew, Bishop Charles de Rosmadec.<sup>79</sup> While alive, de Rosmadec worked to propagate the cult throughout his diocese. After the translation of the saint to his new chapel in 1637, an annual procession of his relics around Vannes was authorized for 6 September, at midnight.<sup>80</sup> In 1645, the bishop issued a synodal ruling that 6 September would be a feast of obligation for all the churches, monasteries, convents and communities of the diocese.<sup>81</sup> To perpetuate the cult, the bishop created a confraternity in the saint's honour in Vannes.<sup>82</sup> Indulgences were also sought from Rome and in 1645 Innocent X granted a plenary pardon for new entrants and for those who participated in the feast day of the confraternity, the anniversary of the translation of the saint's relics on 6 September.<sup>83</sup> The original membership of the saint's confraternity was drawn from the upper echelons of Vannes society. The first *abbés* were René Gouault, archdeacon and canon and René Lechet, Sieur de Saint-Ducar, the seneschal of Vannes.<sup>84</sup> Across the period 1645-1781, Claire Bourhis has uncovered 709 registered members, 647 of whom have known personal details. There were 359 women and 288 men. 12.6 per cent of the recoverable occupations were clerics, 19.6 per cent were noble and 46 per cent bourgeois. Three quarters of the members whose residence

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*Anne d'Auray*. (Paris: Téqui, 2005)108, 119.

78 Le Ménég, *Histoire du diocèse de Vannes*, vol. 2, p. 87.

79 Mouillard, *Vie*, 388-389.

80 Lobineau, *Les vies des saints*, vol. 3, p. 212.

81 Mouillard, *Vie*, 379.

82 ADM 57 G 2 Confrérie de St Vincent Ferrer; Mouillard, *Vie*, 372

83 Mouillard, *Vie*, 373-374.

84 Ibid., 374-375.

is known, were from the city itself.<sup>85</sup> The wealth of the confraternity is reflected in the gifts and foundations of masses it received in the mid-century. In 1647, Jeanne Roze founded nine low and nine high masses, Jean Mahe founded a weekly low mass for Wednesdays and Thomas Autheuil founded twenty-four masses over the course of each year. The confraternity received 1000 *livres* cash, and two annual *rentes* for these foundations.<sup>86</sup> The society remained popular among the better sort of Vannes society into the eighteenth century.

The bishop's patronage encouraged other elite groups to adopt the cause of St Vincent Ferrer as well. The cathedral chapter was particularly active in the propagation of the cult. It was the active body in the commissioning of a new reliquary and chapel in the early 1630s, prior to the translation of his relics in 1636-37. Further, in 1648, the chapter erected a new monumental tomb in the crossing of the cathedral, near to the high altar.<sup>87</sup> No doubt this was partly to augment the revenue of the cathedral. It is difficult to reconstruct the financial benefit of the renewed cult because the seventeenth-century fabric accounts conflate all offerings to altars and relics in a single entry but it seems that there was some increase in donations as a result of the augmentation of the shrine.<sup>88</sup>

Year	Income from relics and altars
1622-23	222 livres
1630-32	287 livres (144 livres p.a.)
1633-37	1107 livres (278 livres p.a.)
1639-40	442 livres (221 livres p.a.)
1643-45	469 livres (235 livres p.a.)
1645-49	1280 livres (320 livres p.a.)

**Table 1:** Income from relics and altars in Vannes Cathedral, 1622-49.

<sup>85</sup> Bourhis, *Le culte de Saint Vincent Ferrer*, 48, 75.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>87</sup> Lobineau, *Les vies des saints de Bretagne*, vol. 3, p. 212.

<sup>88</sup> ADM 74 G 24 – 34. Comptes de la fabrique de la Cathédrale St Pierre de Vannes.

But just as important was the encouragement of devotions to the saint, in which the cathedral canons participated by joining the confraternity and endowing masses at his altar.

Further, following the bishop's and chapter's examples, the lay elites of Vannes also patronised the saint's cult out of personal piety and from a desire to be associated with the cadres favouring the new devotions. For example, in 1637, Julienne Dame de Kermelen gave an annual *rente* of 4 *livres* 10 *sous* for the maintenance of the chapel, 'having been saved from the contagious sickness that infected her household by the vow she made to St Vincent Ferrer, patron of this town'.<sup>89</sup> In 1640, Pierre Senant, almoner to the bishop of Vannes, founded a weekly low mass and a post-mortem obit and in 1641, Françoise Regnaud dame de la Pivissière founded two obits and a procession carrying the head of St Vincent Ferrer, to take place inside the cathedral on 6 September annually.<sup>90</sup> The municipality of Vannes also participated in the cult of the saint and it was thus associated with urban and provincial politics, for Vannes' city administration also participated in the Estates. The city's devotion was partly stimulated by an outbreak of plague in 1637, as a result of which the council made a vow that every September in perpetuity they would have a mass sung in the cathedral and give two candles to the saint's altar. The municipality also founded a daily morning mass in the chapel of St Vincent Ferrer, at a cost of 200 *livres* per year.<sup>91</sup> The city paid for the ceremonies of the translation of the saint's relics in 1637 and during the celebrations, Vannes was dedicated to St Vincent Ferrer. The street leading to the port was named after the saint and his statue was placed above the city gate.<sup>92</sup> Once the annual feast on 6 September had been established, the municipality participated in the city-wide procession of the saint's relics.<sup>93</sup> The municipality also made numerous requests over the century for processions to be organised with the head of the saint for his intercession against plague, drought and other causes.<sup>94</sup> As with other towns in Catholic Europe, the

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89 ADM 74 G 1. Comptes de la fabrique de la Cathédrale St Pierre de Vannes.

90 ADM 55 G 3 ; ADM 55 G 10.

91 Mouillard, *Vie*, 382-383

92 Le Méné, *Histoire du diocèse de Vannes*, vol. 2, p. 79.

93 Ibid., 168.

94 Bourhis, *Le culte de Saint Vincent Ferrer*, 120-21.

municipal government of Vannes sought to ensure the well-being of the city and its inhabitants by placing it under the patronage of a powerful saint.

The religious orders of Vannes worked to promote the cult as well. In the 1620s and early 1630s, convents founded in the diocese used a dedication to St Vincent Ferrer to help tie them to the locality. For example, the discalced Carmelites founded in Vannes in 1628 took St Vincent Ferrer as one of their patrons and were given some fragments of his relics.<sup>95</sup> Relics were dispersed to other churches in Brittany. The Carmelites of Morlaix, the churches of Notre Dame, the Cathedral of St Pierre and the Charterhouse of Nantes had relics as did the Dominicans of Guingamp. The Carmelites of Couëts near Nantes had his culottes, belt and several letters written in his hand.<sup>96</sup> Later, in 1716, the Grand Master of the Order of Malta was given part of an arm, in return for the foundation of a perpetual mass of the office of the saint in the Order's church there.<sup>97</sup> The main proponent of renewed veneration was, as might be expected, the Dominican order.<sup>98</sup> The order in Brittany underwent profound reform in the early seventeenth century and renewed attention to its own saints was one result. Under Pierre Jouauld, the Rennes convent was reformed in 1618, followed by those of Morlaix in 1621-22, Guingamp in 1630 and Nantes in 1631 while four new houses were founded between 1620 and 1647. A separate province was created for Brittany's reformed houses, with a vicar independent of the rest of the Gallican province.<sup>99</sup> To encourage reform, in 1631, Nicolas Rudulfus, the general of the Dominican Order, came to Brittany. He visited the shrine of St Vincent Ferrer and in 1633 the Dominicans founded a convent dedicated to the saint in Vannes. The family of Bishop de Rosmadec played a leading role in financing the new convent, and the recognised founders of the new house were the bishop's nephew and namesake, Sébastien de Rosmadec, and his wife Julienne Bonnier,

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95 Le Grand, *Les vies des saints*, 240.

96 Lobineau, *Les vies des saints*, vol. 3, p. 207.

97 Bourhis, *Le culte de Saint Vincent Ferrer*, 97, 101.

98 Lobineau, *Les vies des saints*, vol. 3, p. 213

99 For a detailed history of the reform in Brittany see Jean Toravel, *Les origines de la réforme des dominicains en Bretagne au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle*. In *Documents pour servir à l'histoire de l'ordre de Saint Dominique en France*, (Lyon: n.p., 1978).



seigneur and dame of Plessis-Josso in Theix parish. They gave 11,000 *livres* for the construction of the convent and the seigneur de Rosmadec laid the first stone in October 1634 in the presence of the bishop and other clergy. He and his wife obtained burial rights in the chancel, their arms were placed there and they were entitled to a weekly mass and two requiem services a year.<sup>100</sup> In 1638, a second patron gave 100 *livres* annual *rente* to the convent in perpetuity. Pierre de Larlan, seigneur of Lanitré, *conseilleur du roi* of the Parlement of Brittany, was taken ill at Auray and vowed a gift to St Vincent Ferrer if the saint would intercede for him. In return for being cured, Larlan financed the construction of a chapel on the south side of the new chancel and asked that it be dedicated to the patron saints of himself, his wife and family, including Vincent. The chapel was again to serve as a private mausoleum for the family, decorated with their arms.<sup>101</sup> The presence of the Dominicans in Vannes was certainly a stimulus for the cult of St Vincent Ferrer, with their own devotions and encouragement of pilgrims to visit his shrine.<sup>102</sup> This was furthered with the financial and social support of members of the local nobility, who also had their own private attachments to the saint.

What is clear is that the renewed cult of St Vincent Ferrer was a local project supported by the diocesan bishop, cathedral chapter, religious orders and local elites, particularly the Rosmadec family. All of these groups brought the saint's authority to bear simultaneously in religious and political spheres. The cathedral chapter and the municipality took the interests of Vannes into the first and third chambers of the provincial Estates. Bishop de Rosmadec and his family were influential in the first and second estates and the bishop in particular was involved in the Estates' dispute with the crown over regional privileges. The Rosmadecs were also patrons of the Dominican Order and it is clear that the 'project' of the political use of saints' lives was supported by both parties. Vincent Ferrer and Yves Mayheuc were Dominicans and as such were given prominence in Brittany by their confreres and biographers, Le Grand and Rechac. When commissioned to promote

100 Le Méné, *Histoire du diocèse de Vannes*, vol. 2, p. 70; J.-M. Le Méné, *Les Dominicains de Vannes*. In 'Bulletin de la Société Polymathique du Morbihan' 22 (1896), 13-16.

101 Ibid., *Les Dominicains de Vannes*, 16-17.

102 Bourhis, *Le culte de Saint Vincent Ferrer*, 13.

Breton saints to illustrate ecclesiastical and thus political distinctiveness in the Estates' dispute with the Crown, they used the opportunity to add Dominican saints to the group. In this way, Breton Dominicans, their saints and their clerical and lay patrons, came together to create the political agenda of the Breton Estates.

### **Conclusions**

In one respect, the revival of the cult of St Vincent Ferrer at Vannes was a local event, important mostly to the city and its cathedral. It provides another example of the resurrection of saintly devotion which is seen across Catholic Europe in the early seventeenth century, a feature of resurgent Counter-Reformation Catholicism which has received wide study. But it has greater consequence than solely as a project of a single community. It provides a case study of the new political dimension to saints' cults seen in Baroque Europe, hitherto examined largely for kingdoms or dynastic states but here manifested at the regional level.

Saints had always been promoted by and used as patrons for ruling dynasties, as signs and agents for their authority and legitimacy. Similarly, local and regional communities adopted saints as their protectors and advocates. After an interruption in the sixteenth century, the power of saints reached a new height in the Baroque Church and also in secular politics. In Brittany, the holy was used in a dispute by a provincial elite against the greater power of the French state. In a period when the sacred justified and supported the temporal, the saints of Brittany and their histories were drawn into regional politics, to support the aspirations of provincial government. As the French Crown augmented its authority over the duchy, Breton clerical, noble and municipal elites looked to the past, to their distinctive cultural history and traditions, seen largely through the religious legacy of the province, to support their case. The Bretons were certain of their distinctiveness from the rest of France and had the evidence in the lives of their saints to support their political claims to legal privilege and autonomy.

The example of St Vincent Ferrer at Vannes also sheds light on two further features of the Baroque Church. Firstly, the augmentation of papal authority and prestige over regional churches is shown in Vannes

Cathedral's choice of this papally-approved cult over that of local saints. Secondly, it is testimony to changing fashions and expectations of saints at the local and regional level. Alain Croix has argued that in Brittany, particularly in the west, local Celtic saints related to the early conversion of Brittany continued to be favoured throughout the early modern period, rather than the general saints of the international church. Certainly, veneration of local saints was active. Mamert, who cured stomach ailments, Hubert who protected against rabies, Cornély who cured cattle and Meriadec, an early bishop of Vannes, who cured headaches, received prayers and gifts.<sup>103</sup> There was also a lively scholarly interest in Celtic saints' lives and deeds, part of a widespread counter-reformation interest in sacred histories, shown in hagiographies such as Le Grand's work. This was extended further from the mid-seventeenth century onwards, when the Maurist congregation in Brittany undertook a massive work of historical synthesis and publication of primary documents related to the province's religious past, including the massive *Les Vies des Saints de Bretagne* of Gui-Alexis Lobineau.<sup>104</sup> But over time there was a shift to the pre-eminence of international saints in everyday devotions and indeed, the definition of 'local' saint changed. Above all other saints, veneration of the Virgin grew across the period. New altars, masses and shrines receive Marian rather than local invocations, such as the fountain of Notre Dame at Plancoët, near to Corseul in northern Brittany and Notre Dame de Bonnes Nouvelles in Rennes. The development of rosary use among all social groups from the fifteenth century onwards is the most widespread evidence of Mary's popularity. Mary's importance is also reflected in the growing veneration of her mother and her husband. The important pilgrimage shrine of St Anne near Auray is one example. These 'international' cult sites rapidly overtook the local sites in importance. The superior efficacy of widely-venerated saints may be seen in the greater frequentation of these sites, in terms of numbers of pilgrims and gifts and donations.

St Vincent Ferrer was another such saint. He was international

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103 Croix, *La Bretagne*.

104 Bernard Merdrignac, *L'apport des sources hagiographiques à l'histoire de la Bretagne médiévale*. In Tonnerre ed., *Chroniqueurs et historiens de la Bretagne*, 32-33.

and local, his wide influence drawn down into the cathedral of Vannes and his reputation used to bolster claims of Breton particularity. Yet he remained a saint of the wider world as well. Local saints were certainly important in supporting political claims for ecclesiastical, fiscal and legal autonomy in Brittany. Their lives bore witness to the distinctive history, practices and privileges of the independent, ducal past. Yet international figures were also used for indigenous purposes, as popular devotions localized them on Breton soil. For example, pilgrimage to the shrine of St Anne at Auray ultimately became the most popular of the province, an act which defined Bretonness for many people. The new cults and site had an intermediary status between the local and the universal church, with a plurality of audiences. This served to augment their spiritual authority. It was also an important contributor to their increasing political authority as well.

Yet Breton practices also reflected those of the wider kingdom, drew French elites more closely into the province and linked Bretons to the wider kingdom and beyond. The king provides the prime example of this process. He was the duke of Brittany; his ancestors lay in the churches of the province and he and his Queen patronized cult sites there. Louis XIII and Anne of Austria gave gifts to the shrine of St Anne d'Auray. The special history of Brittany was therefore his history, and underwrote his authority in the province. Religions and politics in the 1630s was a negotiated passage through tradition and novelty, which called upon the saints for support.